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SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. As the world organization of parliaments and an organization gathering together politicians, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1/ has decided that in its programme for the advancement of women special emphasis should be placed on a permanent basis on two major subjects: (i) the participation of women in politics and (ii) the question of violence against women and girls. This clearly does not prevent it from dealing as appropriate with other issues.

Participation of women in politics

2. When analysing the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985), IPU, 2/ particularly its women parliamentarians, felt that the chapter on political participation should be considerably expanded. This is why IPU decided to focus its women's programme primarily on that issue. It did so, initiating at the world level the systematic collection of data which had not previously been available and which it felt was indispensable if IPU was to define lines for action to change a reality all too evident to any common

* E/1994/100.

citizen: at the close of this twentieth century and 40 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, political and parliamentary life remains clearly dominated by men in every country of the world.

3. A great many IPU surveys and meetings over the past 10 years have produced a precise, in-depth picture of the situation. Thus, the map of the world showing the proportion of women in all national parliaments (produced by IPU and also distributed by the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat) shows that, world wide, women parliamentarians represent no more than 10.1 per cent of all members of parliament (MPs). They accounted for 15 per cent of all MPs before the upheavals that got under way in 1989 and it seems that the situation is getting worse. Updated statistics will be made available to participants at the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995.

4. Faced with these adverse results, IPU felt that some action had to be taken if, instead of remaining men's private domain, politics was to reflect what society is. This is why it elaborated a Plan of Action to Remedy Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life.

5. The Plan of Action was unanimously adopted in Paris on 26 March 1994 by the Inter-Parliamentary Council, the plenary governing body of IPU. The Plan of Action was prepared as the IPU's main intellectual contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women and is the result of an in-depth extended consultation of all national parliaments that was initiated in early 1992. It was elaborated by a group of twelve parliamentarians, six men and six women, representing the six main regions, civilizations and political cultures of the world. 3/

6. The backbone of the Plan of Action is a vision of democracy and indeed of society. The IPU believes that: "the concept of DEMOCRACY will only assume true and dynamic significance when political and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interest and aptitudes of both halves of the population".

7. The Plan of Action thus hinges on two complementary concepts:

(a) That of "PARITY, reflecting the fact that persons of either sex are different but nevertheless equal";

(b) That of "Partnership, which shows that a creative synergy may come into being between men and women to confront and settle the problems facing the community".

8. The Plan of Action stresses that "women's rights come under the category of rights of the human person and should be specifically recognized as such in the national Constitution or in any other basic text of constitutional rank" and it further states that "however specific they may be, women's issues are questions that concern society as a whole".

9. The Plan of Action underlines the fact that the difference between men and women should not be denied and that it should, on the contrary, be recognized and acknowledged as an advantage and not a limitation.

10. Conscious of the danger of placing the emphasis on women only, the Plan of Action also refers to the controversial system of quotas in the following way: "On a strictly interim basis, affirmative action measures may be adopted. Wherever the measure chosen is a quota system, it is proposed that the quota should not target women but that, in a spirit of equity, it may be established that neither sex may occupy a proportion of seats inferior to a given percentage.

11. The Plan of Action seeks responses to problems common to all societies without losing sight of specific regional and national features. Accordingly, it is flexible in its approach and cautious in its wording so as not to clash with distinctive values. It further takes account of the fact that political participation cannot be viewed in isolation. Other indicators pertaining to the enjoyment of civil, economic, social and cultural rights need to be taken into account and were borne in mind.

12. There are five facets to the Plan of Action:

(a) The first section deals with everything that precedes participation in politics, that is, the conditions enabling women to take an active part in political life. This touches more particularly on the question of the values of civilization, both cultural and religious, as well as on education, employment, health and participation in economic life;

(b) The second section deals with the legal bases for equality between men and women in constitutions and national legislation;

(c) The third section concerns political participation as such at the national level. It broaches such matters as the promotion of political awareness among women and respect for the principle of equality within political parties, in addition to women's participation in elections and the exercise of political responsibilities by men and women;

(d) The fourth section concerns women's participation in IPU activities;

(e) The fifth section provides for a mechanism of five-yearly evaluation of the implementation of the Plan of Action.

13. IPU feels confident that the Plan of Action can help modify distinctive national realities. Its members work to this end, trusting that this will come about through the process of reflection nourished by the Plan of Action as much as through the actual measures it prompts at the various levels of political life.

14. As the Plan of Action is IPU's main intellectual input for the Fourth World Conference on Women, IPU trusts that Governments will find it appropriate to incorporate some of the points highlighted above and many other important ones in their regional plans of action as well as in the Platform for Action that is expected to emanate from the Conference.

15. True to the concept of parity and partnership, IPU itself will be represented at the Conference by a delegation formed of an equal number of male

and female parliamentarians. IPU further hopes that the greatest possible number of parliamentarians will participate in that world event, either as part of their national delegations or as part of the Non-governmental Organizations Forum. Since women's issues are societal issues, IPU hopes that the Fourth World Conference on Women will not be a huge gathering composed mainly of women, as has been the case in previous events of the kind, but that all national delegations will include an equal share of men and women.

16. At the kind invitation of the National People's Congress of China, the Inter-Parliamentary Union will hold a meeting of all parliamentarians in attendance at the Fourth World Conference on Women on 7 September 1995 so that a proper bridge may be established between the work and vision of Governments and those of parliaments. Indeed, parliamentarians will have the special responsibility of translating the results of the Conference into national legislation and it is thus advisable that they be associated with the process from the very beginning. Naturally, this applies to all five preparatory conferences.

Violence against women

17. The question of violence against women and girls is a matter of great concern to IPU, which in the last three years has placed special emphasis on means to eradicate it.

18. In 1991, IPU adopted a resolution entitled "Policies to put an end to violence against women and children", which contains a full catalogue of measures that should help to control this world-wide problem. Women parliamentarians at IPU have since then continued to discuss ways in which these measures have indeed been applied and to what effect.

19. IPU had further advocated the early adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and is now encouraging parliaments to make sure that national legislation meets the norms and principles enshrined in that important document.

20. Last but not least, IPU, which condemns the rape of women as a weapon of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in any other situation of conflict, had strongly advocated the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women, expressing preference for the appointment of a woman for that job. It welcomes the recent appointment of Mrs. Coomaraswamy of Sri Lanka, to whom it conveyed material straight away.

Notes

1/ The national parliaments of 129 countries are represented at IPU, which also has three associate members, as follows: Members: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe. Associate Members: Andean Parliament, Latin American Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

2/ Women members of IPU member parliaments meet twice a year at its statutory meetings; they may also meet at specialized world or regional IPU meetings. This strong network has been very instrumental both in developing the IPU programme for the advancement of women and in ensuring the better visibility of women within IPU and partnership with men in the decision-making process.

3/ Chairperson: Mrs. R. Simmen (Switzerland); Groups of Sub-Saharan African countries: Mr. N. Nyasham (Zimbabwe); Mrs. Mbayang Leyti Ndiaye (Senegal); Groups of Latin America: Mr. A. Alonso (Uruguay); Mrs. Elda Escalame Arzadum (Bolivia); Groups of Asia and the Pacific: Mr. R. S. Roco (Philippines); Mrs. T. Darsoyo (Indonesia); Groups of Arab countries: Mr. S. Khaddour (Syrian Arab Republic); Mrs. K. Karrar (Sudan); Groups represented within the Twelve Plans: Mr. E. Helle (Finland); Mrs. R. Simmen (Switzerland); Groups of central and eastern Europe: Mrs. E. Poptodorova (Bulgaria); Mr. J. Wiatr (Poland).